JAPAN IN KOREA

By FRANK G. CARPENTER.

VISCOUNT AONE, THE ACTING RESIDENT GENERAL, TELLS WHAT HIS PEOPLE HOPE TO DO WITH THE COUNTRY.

He Says the Koreans Are Unable to Govern Themselves and That Japan Must Teach Them—A Campaign of Education, Sanitary Improvement and Advanced Agriculture—Room for Twenty Million More People—The Brigands and the Fire Robbers—The Open Door and Foreign Trade—The New Government Hospital—A Korean Garden Party.

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It was at the residency general, a big frame office building that stands on the hill not far from the south gate, that I met Viscount Arasuke Sone, the man who, in the absence of Prince Ito, is acting as the real ruler of this land of Korea. On my way there I passed the palace in which the retired emperor is practically imprisoned, and as I went on through the Japanese quarter and climbed the hill I could see the palaces of the present emperor over the great plain of tiled roofs composing the city. I have already described my audience with him and given you some idea of his mental calibre. He is merely a figurehead, and has no power whatever outside of his immediate court. The man I met today is under the direct control of the Emperor of Japan, and he is now exercising supervision over all affairs in Korea. The country is nominally governed by the local officials, but they act as the resident general directs, and neither appointments nor dismissals can be made without his consent.

By the agreement between Japan and Korea, when the emperor was deposed and his son put in his place, it was stipulated that the resident general should reform the administration and that the government of Korea should not enact any law or do any important thing without his approval. I was provided that it should appoint Japanese to such official positions as the resident general recommended, and that no foreigner should be engaged without his consent. In short, it meant the turning over of the Korean government almost absolutely into the hands of Japan, and this is the condition today.

The Man Who Rules Korea.

Viscount Sone is well known as an administrator. He has been several times in the cabinet of the mikado, and has been a real working force in Korea. He knows all about the country; and, while conservative in his statements, evidently believes that the Japanese will be able to handle it successfully. During my talk of today I asked him whether he thought the Koreans were capable of self-government. He replied:

"They are not so now. All their traditions and training have been along the lines of oppression and corruption. They have been unmercifully squeezed by their rulers and do not know what good government means. It will take some time to educate them to it. We shall have to teach them to crawl before they can walk, and it will be years before they are able to govern themselves."

"Is it the idea of Japan to make the country independent?"

"Yes, when the conditions are such that it can maintain an independence which will be for the good of the people and at the same time not injurious to the interests of Japan."

The Anti-Japanese Sentiment.

"What is the situation today, your excellency? I understand that many of the Koreans are not in favor of the new regime?"

"That is true," replied the resident general. "These people cannot appreciate the fact that Japan is anxious to benefit them and their country. They have been oppressed by foreigners through a series of years and not fairly treated. For a long time they were under the protection of the Chinese government, which largely directed their affairs for its own benefit. Then the Japanese, after their war with China, took charge of many things and the Russians did likewise. The result is that the people suspect our sincerity. They cannot believe that their rights and property are not to be taken away from them, or that their country is not eventually to be a second Japan. It will take a long time to eradicate these suspicions, and it cannot be done by pronounciamentos and speeches. It will have to be accomplished by works, and that is what we propose to do. We shall build roads, establish industries and introduce improved agricultural methods. We have already wiped out most of the corrupt courts, and are seeing that the people have justice among themselves. We have reformed the system of taxation; and that in such a way as to materially reduce the burdens imposed by the tax-gatherers of the past. We are starting schools here in Seoul and elsewhere, and we are doing all we can to give the Koreans a square deal."

Brigands and Fire Robbers .

"But you have not been able to give them peace, your excellency," said I.

"No, there is still trouble in different parts of the peninsula. This is due somewhat to disaffection as regards the government, but more to a system of brigadage which has gone on for years. There are in Korea companies of bandits, known as fire-robbers, because they blackmail the villages and often burn them down in order to rob the people. We are more afraid of this element now than of any other. It rises at certain times of the year; and is at its worst just after harvest when the rice is gathered and all other work stopped. Then these robbers begin. They are performed by bands of from five to twenty-five or more brigands and they seem to break out simultaneously over the country. During certain years there are as many as fifteen thousand of these men, and they have been operating from year to year for almost a century. They are so many that we could not easily control them if they were organized, but we are policing Korea and thus keeping the bands apart. In time we shall wipe them out. You will remember that you had a similar trouble with your people in the Philippines. It has taken us eight years to get the aborigines of Formosa into satisfactory shape; and I judge it will take several years before we can bring peace, safety and quiet to every part of this land."

"Are the Koreans as easy to govern as the Filipinos?"

"I think not," replied the resident general. "The Filipinos are more simple, less educated and more easily handled. The Koreans have had a government and a fair amount of civilization for many, many years. It is difficult to change them, and the rank and file are not anxious to take up new things. As I have said, we can only expect to teach them by works, by giving them a practical and an optical demonstration of our ideas."

Improved Agriculture.

"What do you mean by that, your excellency?"

"I mean that we shall show the Koreans that we are their friends by the development of their country. As it is now, the woods have been cut from the mountains and many of the peaks are as bare as a desert. This makes it impossible to conserve the rainfall, and we have not the water needed for irrigation. One of our first works will be along the lines of reforestation. We are planting trees in many places and have laid out model forests near Seoul, Ping Yang and Taiku. These forests cover thousands of acres and have cost several hundred thousand yen. We find the trees grow well and hope in time to have the mountains again covered with verdure.

"We are also establishing experimental farms," continued his excellency, "and are trying to teach the people to make the most of their lands. At present there is little use of manure, and they know nothing of artificial fertilizers. They do not appreciate the possibilities of their soil. It will produce eight-tenths of the varieties of things grown in Japan and some which we cannot successfully cultivate.

"This is especially so as to cotton. We are experimenting with that at half a dozen different places in southern Korea. We have used the native seed and also the American upland. So far the native seed seems the better. Our experts estimate that there are a half million acres of good cotton land in Korea, and that we can eventually raise all the cotton we need here and have a large amount for shipment abroad."

Room for Twenty Millions More.

"Suppose Korea were carefully farmed, how many people could it support?"

"That question is difficult to answer," said Viscount Sone. "We have now about twenty million people here. This is above other estimates, but there are parts of the country which are thickly populated. If all the land available could be used and improved methods employed on it and on the farms now under cultivation, there is no doubt but what we could produce twice as much as we do know. This means that Korea could then support forty millions without much trouble. It might support more.

"In that case you will have an outlet for the congestion of Japan, will you not?"

"To some extent, yes; but, so far, the Japanese farmers do not seem anxious to come to Korea. The methods of cultivation are different here, as are also the soil and conditions of life. We have been encouraging immigration, but as yet have not had many of the farming class. A great deal of the undeveloped land lies in the northern part of the country. The farming there is more like that of the United States and our people do not take to it. Indeed, I expect to see a growth of the Korean population, rather than an influx from Japan."

Sanitary Improvements.

"We are greatly improving the sanitary conditions of the country," continued Viscount Sone. "This will cut down the death rate and, with better times, the birth rate will grow. As it is now, the people know almost nothing about taking care of their health. Smallpox occurs regularly from year to year, and little prevention is used to stop it. We have established vaccine farms and are vaccinating the people as rapidly as possible. We find it very hard to do this especially in the country districts. The Koreans do not understand what vaccination means and they are more afraid of it than of the smallpox. These same conditions prevailed at the time vaccination was introduced into Japan. It may interest you to know that I was the first baby vaccinated there. That was fifty-eight years ago. The vaccine matter took and I have never had the smallpox. I make it a rule, however, to be revaccinated every five years."

"How about your hospitals?"

"We have, as you know, just completed a large one in Seoul. This now has one hundred beds and is thoroughly equipped in every respect. There is a medical college connected with it, and we expect to educate young doctors who will practice throughout the country. We are improving the chief cities by cleaning them. You see what is going on in Seoul. Similar work is being done in Fusan, Chemulpo, and elsewhere."

Korean Mines.

The conversation here turned to mining concessions, and I asked his excellency if foreigners had any chance to make money mining in Korea. He replied:

"They have as many opportunities as the Japanese. The minerals, with the exception of coal, are open to all. As it is now, some of the most valuable mines are held by Americans, and there are a number of large concessions belonging to foreigners."

"Is the country rich, minerally?"

"It has minerals in many parts of it," said the resident general, "but I believe not in large quantities. Most of the mining properties are small, and so far no great and valuable discoveries, outside of the gold and copper mines, have been made. Korea contains silver, gold, copper and iron. There is considerable coal, but the supply of fuel out here in the Far East is so limited that we have special regulations concerning it."

"Is there enough coal and iron to make Korea an industrial country?"

"I think so. We shall eventually have factories and foundries and will make for ourselves many of the things which we buy from abroad."

The Open Door.

"Does the open door exist in Korea, your excellency?"

"Yes, according to the treaties, the goods of all countries come in on the same terms. There are no discriminations in favor of Japan, and indeed Japan has the worst of it as to some importations. This is so with tobacco. That is a monopoly in Japan and the government fixes the prices. Every one knows what the merchants have to pay for the Japanese tobaccos. Therefore the American Tobacco Company and others can slip in their wares and undersell the Japanese. I believe they are doing that now.

"As to our foreign trade, that will rapidly increase under the new regime, and it is now approximately thirty million gold dollars. Seven years ago it was less than twelve millions. The growth is chiefly in imports, although the exports have more than doubled within four years. The imports were over forty-one million yen in 1907."

"What proportion of your trade comes from Japan?"

"In 1907 our imports amounted to twenty-seven million yen, or not quite three-fourths of the whole. They are increasing steadily with the growth of Japanese business houses here. It is the same with the exports. Japan is taking more and more of the products of Korea every year, and about three-fourths of all the country sells now comes to her. The greater part of the trade consists of agricultural crops and fish, the surplus of which is used in Japan. The biggest export is that of rice, which in 1907 amounted to in the neighborhood of four million dollars."

"How about your trade with America?"

"Your exports to Korea were over three million yen last year, and this is just a little under what Korea bought from China and two million yen less than what we bought from China and two million yen less than what she bought from Great Britain. It is only one-tenth of what was bought from Japan."

Tobacco in Korea.

On my way back from the residency general I looked at the tobacco stores, and the American goods sold in them. Our tobaccos are far more popular here than those of Japan, and the American cigarette promises to drive out the old Korean pipe. These people are great smokers. I see little boys of ten and twelve with pipes in their mouths, and one of the most common sights on the streets is a half dozen or more men in long white gowns and big hats, squatting on their heels and smoking pipes which have reed stems about four feet in length. Some of these pipes are so long that a servant has to be kept to light them, as a man cannot reach to the bowl with the pipe in his mouth. The bowls of the Korean pipes hold about as much as a thimble. They are usually brass. The mouthpiece are of the same metal, or in the pipes of the rich they may be made of amber or jade. The common people use shorter pipes while working, as the long pipe can be smoked safely only when sitting down. The man who attempts to smoke one while walking or running is liable to stumble and drive the stem down his throat.

The use of cigarettes is now common even among the working classes, and the women are beginning to fancy them. Many of the cigarettes are of native tobacco, which sell at from 3 to 5 cents a package. Next to these come the Japanese cigarettes, which are partially made of American tobacco, and then the wares of the American Tobacco Company, which are the best and most popular of all.

The New Government Hospital.

During my talk with the resident general he referred to the new hospital here, which has just been completed. A big garden party was given at the dedication of the institution, at which more than 1,500 of the high-class Koreans, the Japanese officials and a few of the foreign residents were present. I was fortunate enough to have an invitation. The hospital is situated under the mountains, some distance from the east gate and just next the east palace. Its grounds contain many acres of rolling land, spotted with beautiful pines, knotted and gnarled.

The hospital itself, which stands high up on a hill and overlooks Seoul, is a big red brick building covering more than an acre of ground. It consists of a main building, which contains parlors, laboratories and operating rooms, and back of these are long wings, which form the wards. The laboratories are large and well equipped with all sorts of electrical instruments and the tools for bacteriological investigation. The wards already have one hundred beds, and they are so arranged that more can be accommodated. The medical college connected with the institution has Japanese and foreign professors. The head of the hospital is Baron Sato, who was president of the chief military hospital of Japan during the Chinese and Russian wars, and who cut the bullet out of Li Hung Chang's face when he was shot by the Japanese fanatic at the peace conference. The vice director is Dr Takashina, who for years was physician to the Emperor of Japan; and among the professors of the medical college is Dr. W. B. Scranton, who came to Korea more than twenty years ago as a medical missionary and who is one of the best known physicians in this part of the world.

A Korean Garden Party.

Among the many guests present at the garden party not one was dressed in the big horse-hair hat and long gown of silk or linen which a few years ago was the badge of the Korean nobility. All wore foreign clothes, the men having tall hats and long frock coats. Not a few were in military uniforms, and among these were the uncle and cousin of the present emperor. His imperial majesty was expected, but at the last moment gave up coming. Had he been present he would have been in the uniform of a Korean general, which is practically the same as that of the Japanese military officers.

As to the latter, they were out in force. On horseback and in carriages with coachmen and footmen in livery, the principal officials of the government came to the hospital; and altogether there was so much military display that the party would not have seemed out of place at an army and navy reception at the White House.

We first went through the building and after this were given a luncheon in tents outside. The tents covered more than an acre. They were decorated with red and white bunting and hundreds of flags of all nations hung down over the guests as they ate. The meal was served in European style, at long tables beautifully decorated with flowers and fruit. Beside each plate were glasses for champagne and other wines, a copious supply of which was served. The men included roast beef, chicken, duck, pate de foi gras

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